

March 16, 2009

Connecticut General Assembly
Education Committee
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, Connecticut

Dear Connecticut Legislators,

This correspondence serves to document a position of support for a bill before the legislature which would allow the State Board of Education to establish a resident teacher certificate. My support for this legislation is based on my seven years of experience as Executive Director of Human Resources for Bridgeport Public Schools, one of Connecticut's poorest school districts and my very positive experiences with Teach for America teachers.

Bridgeport Public Schools has been provided the opportunity during school years 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 to hire corps members from Teach for America. This initiative has provided Bridgeport Public Schools with 32 talented, well-educated and well-prepared, certified teachers for positions which may have been filled with long term substitutes. As you know a teacher shortage exists in Connecticut in the content areas of mathematics, science, English and foreign language. The greatest impact of the teacher shortage problem is felt in the urban school districts since urban school districts cannot compete in the areas of salary, benefits and working conditions with the affluent suburban school districts. Many teaching positions in these critical content areas are often filled with unqualified staff. Teach for America is an initiative that has allowed Bridgeport Public Schools to provide "highly qualified" staff for Bridgeport's students.

Teach for America teachers in Connecticut are recruited, trained and supported through an intense and proven model that includes a rigorous summer training program before the teachers enter the classroom including a student teaching experience in a summer school classroom. The professional development support extends developmentally appropriate training and support over the course of the first two years of teaching. In addition the Bridgeport Public Schools provides support and training in order to foster the teachers' growth.

Principals in Bridgeport have reported that Teach for America teachers have a strong desire to succeed with their students, meaning these teachers hold their students to high academic standards of achievement. Principals throughout our School District have been impressed with our TFA teachers' dedication to student achievement and closing the achievement gap. The Office of Human Resources with the Principal's support has created a lab school at Barnum School where seven TFA

teachers have been assigned. Our goal is to collect data pertaining to the academic achievement of Barnum School students.

Several independent studies have been conducted to gauge the effectiveness of Teach for America corps members relative to teachers who entered the profession via other teacher training models. In a study published by the Urban Institute and the Calder Center in March 2008, the authors found "that TFA teachers tend to have a positive effect on high school student test scores relative to non-TFA teachers, including those who are certified in-field.

Mathematica Policy Research also addressed the effectiveness of TFA teachers in a study published in June 2004. The study compared the gains in reading and math achievement made by students randomly assigned to TFA teachers or other teachers in the same school. The results showed that, on average, students with TFA teachers raised their mathematics test scores .15 standard deviations more than the gains made by other students. This is equivalent to students having received one extra month of instruction.

According to an independent study by Kan, Parsons and Associates Inc. in 2003 the great majority of principals who work with Teach for America teachers contend that TFA corps members make a significant and positive impact in their classrooms. 90% of principals expressed that TFA teachers are as well-prepared to teach as other first year teachers. 66% of the principals surveyed believed that Teach for America training is "better than average."

The legislation to be considered would enable the State Board of Education to establish a resident teacher certificate which would allow TFA teachers in Connecticut to earn their initial teacher certificate over the course of a year. This is the process that other states employ, for example, the state of New York offers a transitional B license which allows teachers who have completed an orientation program and passed two state tests to complete their training over a three year period. Connecticut competes with New York for talented teachers, especially in the critical shortage areas, and if a residency certificate is not established Connecticut Public Schools and specifically Connecticut's urban school districts will not have the same opportunity to recruit talented TFA teachers.

I thank the Legislature in advance for their consideration of this bill. I encourage you to adopt the bill for all of the aforementioned reasons cited, but foremost for the sake of the poorest school districts in Connecticut. Support for Teach for America is support for Connecticut's urban school districts' students and provides these students with opportunities for academic success.

Sincerely,

Carole Pannozzo

Carole Pannozzo
Executive Director of Human Resources